

IOWA CHILD ADVOCACY BOARD



FY 2003 ANNUAL REPORT

Iowa Child Advocacy Board
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The State Board: The Iowa Child Advocacy Board is an independent board in the Executive Branch, composed of a nine-member board of volunteers, appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Iowa Senate. The State Board operates two volunteer child advocacy programs: the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program and the Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board (ICFCRB). The State Board establishes policies and procedures and is responsible for ensuring adequate funding and staff to support the work of the community volunteers for both programs. The State Board is also charged with ensuring that both programs are in compliance with the Iowa Code, which provides the legal basis for citizen involvement in child welfare issues.

CASA: *History:* The Court Appointed Special Advocate Program was created in 1986 by the Iowa Supreme Court as a special program of the Judicial Branch. Effective July 1, 2002 (FY 2003) the program was moved to the Executive Branch under the control of the Child Advocacy Board.

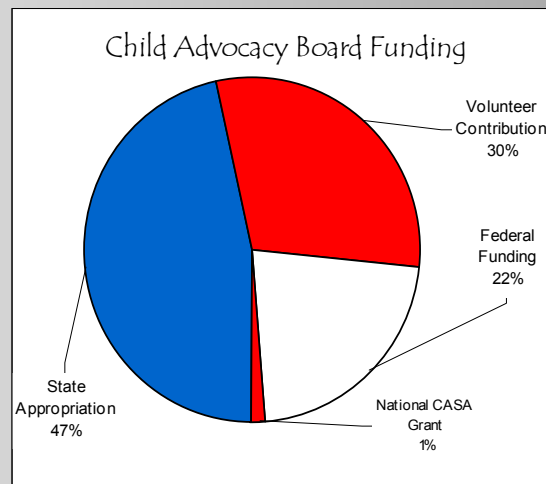
Our Mission: The Iowa Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program commissions community volunteers to serve as an effective voice in court for abused and neglected children, strengthening efforts to ensure that each child is living in a safe, permanent and nurturing home. ***Role:*** CASA volunteers are appointed by the Court to advocate for a specific abused or neglected child. The CASA volunteer serves many roles in a child's court case, including investigation, assessment, facilitation, advocacy, and monitoring.

ICFCRB: *History:* The Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board was created by the Iowa Legislature in 1984 to ensure that planning for permanency would occur for all of Iowa's children. ***Our Mission:*** The Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board empowers the citizens of Iowa to review cases, collect data, and recommend changes to promote the safety and permanency of children who have been removed from the homes of their families. ***Role:*** ICFCRB volunteers are appointed by the Court to serve on a local, community board that conducts a review of the case of each child in out-of-home placement in their community once every six months. The ICFCRB volunteers make specific findings and recommendations as to the individual case as well as systemic findings and recommendations for Iowa's child welfare system.

Program Coverage: By the end of FY 2003, the CASA program was established in 44 counties and the ICFCRB program was operating in 56 counties. The following maps show the location of each program:

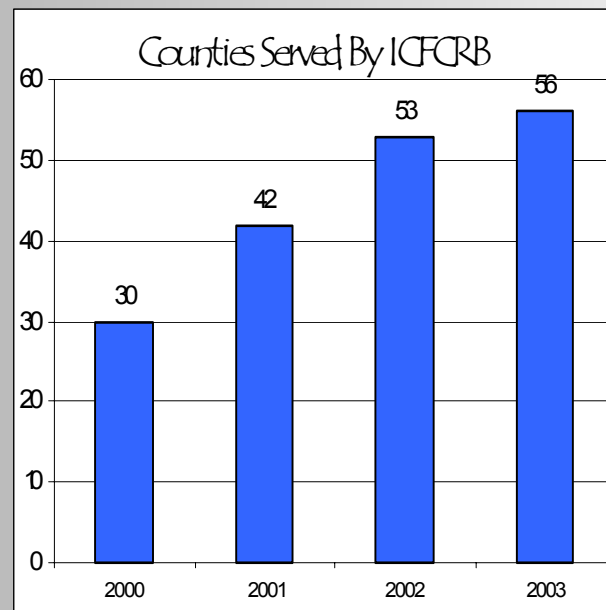
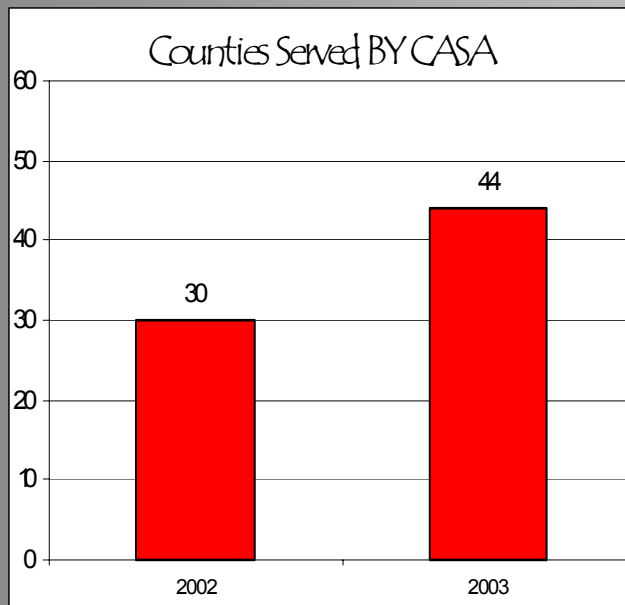


Program Funding: Both programs operated by the Iowa Child Advocacy Board receive state funding and a great deal of volunteer support. The ICFCRB program also receives substantial federal funding. The following charts show the funding sources for the two programs:



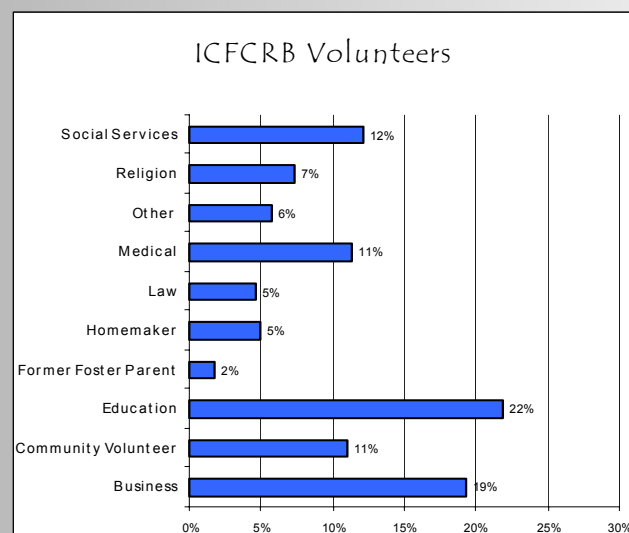
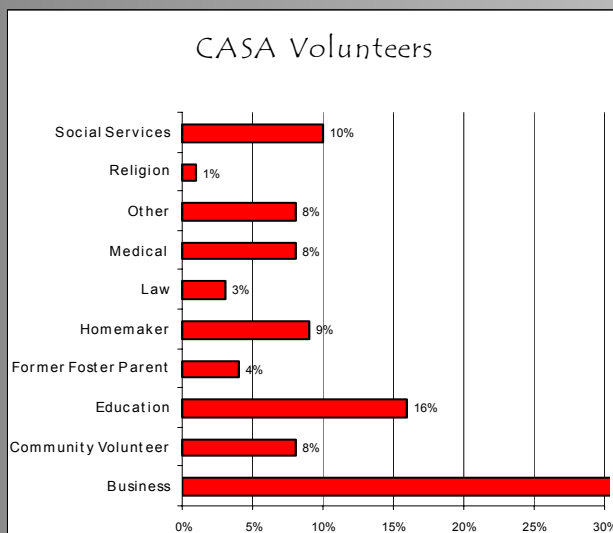
Program Expansion: In spite of tough economic times and resultant budget cuts, both programs operated by the Iowa Child Advocacy Board have expanded their program coverage and service of abused and neglected children. This has

included increasing the number of counties where the programs operate as well as the number of children served:

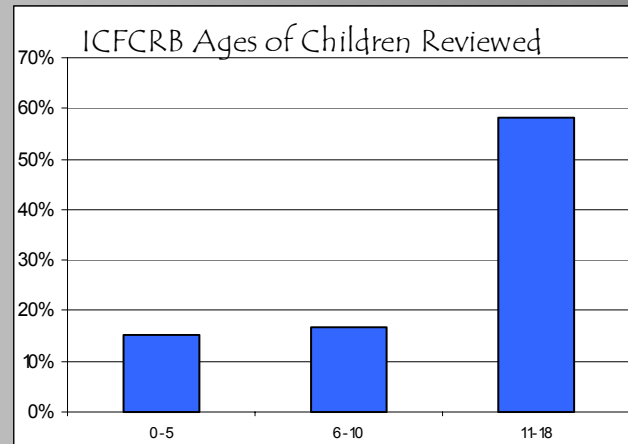
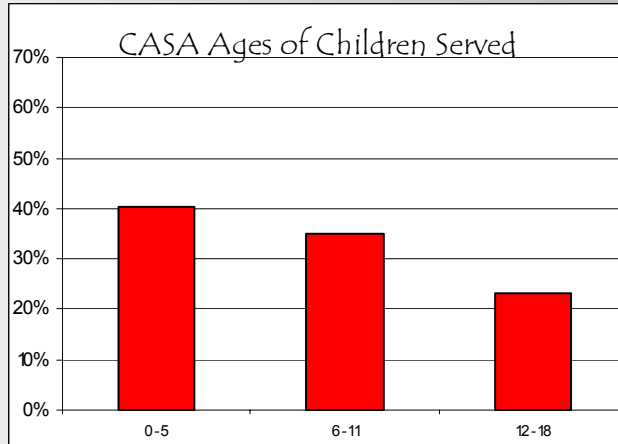


Both programs served a record number of children in FY 2003. CASA served a record 1,168 children and ICFCRB conducted a record 4,285 reviews during FY 2003.

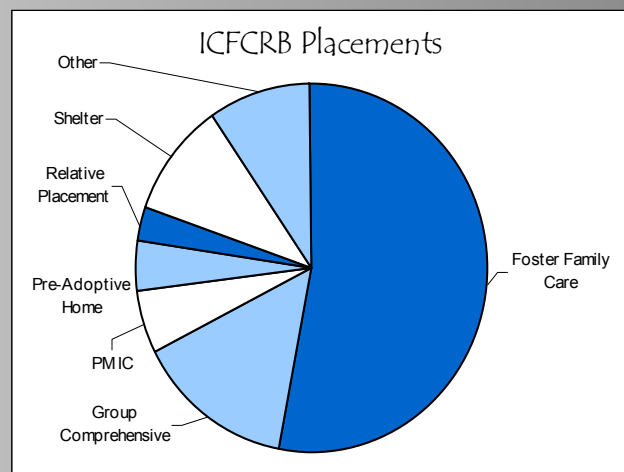
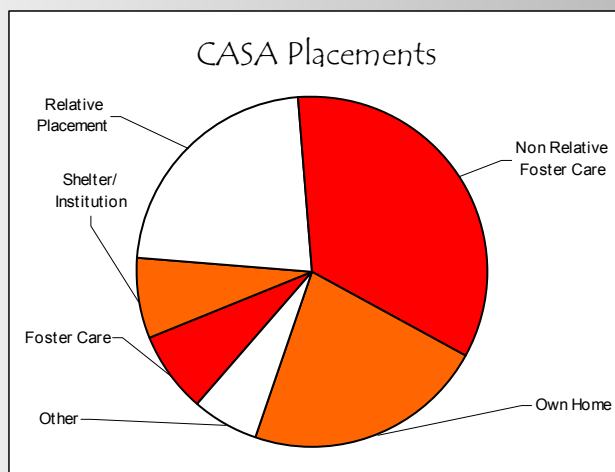
Volunteer Profiles: Both the CASA program and the ICFCRB program have an outstanding corps of volunteers. At the end of FY 2003, there were a total of 408 active CASA volunteers and a total of 388 active ICFCRB volunteers. The backgrounds of the volunteers for each program are illustrated as follows:



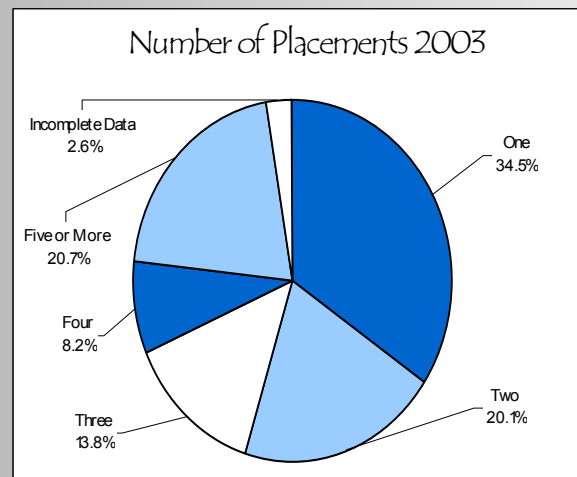
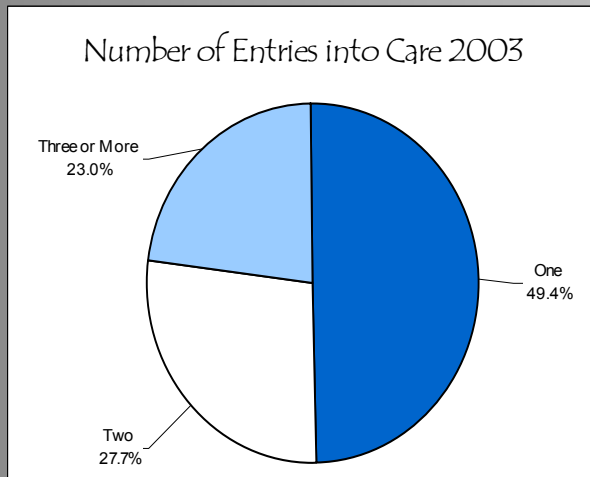
Children Served: Because the ICFCRB program reviews the cases of all children in care, the age of the children served by that program is indicative of the children in out-of-home placement, with most of them being ages 11-18. CASA volunteers, on the other hand, tend to serve the younger children:



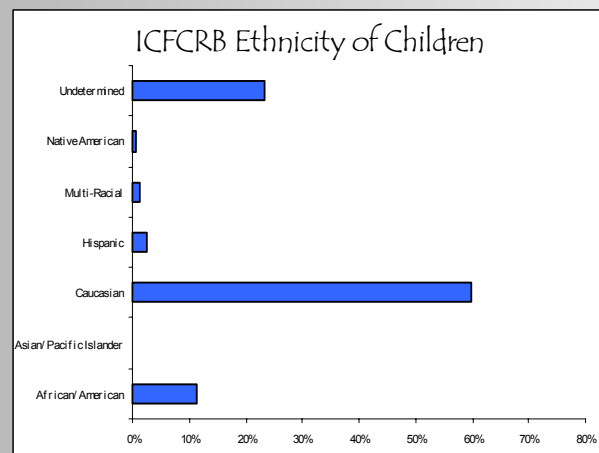
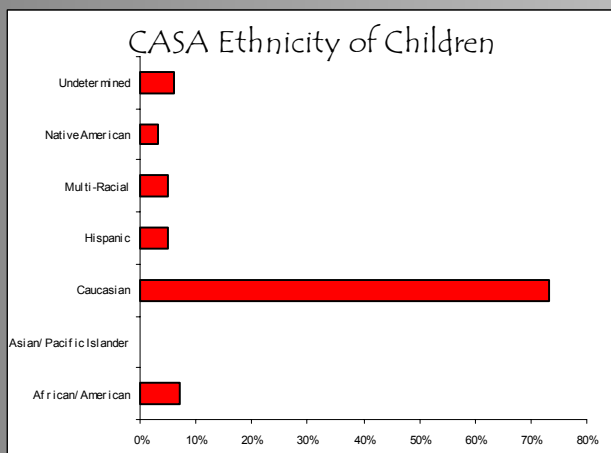
The CASA program serves a substantial number of children who have not been removed from the homes of their families, while the ICFCRB volunteers only review the cases of children in out-of-home placement. Placement type for the children served, consequently, varies for the two programs:



Number of Entries into Care: For the children in out-of home placement, the ICFCRB program measures both the number of times children in care have entered Iowa's child welfare system as well as the number of placements that the children have experienced. The data for FY 2003 shows the following:



Ethnicity of Children in Care: Both programs keep track of the racial background of the children served. The ICFCRB data is reflective of all of the children in care in the areas served. The ethnicity of the children served by the CASA program is fairly close to the same as the ethnicity of the children in care as tabulated by the ICFCRB program. The data for FY 2003 shows the following:



FINDINGS

During FY 2003, the 408 CASA volunteers and the 388 ICFCRB volunteers, combined, spent a total of 62,246 hours working with Iowa's child welfare system and advocating for abused and neglected children involved in that system. Based upon those experiences, the Iowa Child Advocacy Board makes the following FINDINGS:

- **As a result of the current financial downturn, services being offered to the children and families who enter Iowa's child welfare system continue to be reduced, in spite of greater numbers of children and families needing those services and an increase in the complexity of those needs. The result is that the welfare of Iowa's most vulnerable children is being threatened.**
- **Preventive services have been largely eliminated to deal with budget cuts, and, as a result, Iowa's children and families, as well as Iowa's child welfare system itself, will continue to struggle for years after the current financial crisis is abated.**
- **Children in Iowa's child welfare system have no continuity of services because of inordinate turnover and reassignment of Iowa Department of Human Services social workers, and the rotation of judges hearing juvenile cases. This has not only created uncertainty for affected children and families, but has also delayed their success upon reunification.**
- **Child welfare programming varies considerably throughout the state from DHS service area to service area. Best practices in one service area are not necessarily incorporated into other service areas.**
- **Group care caps have contributed to children spending increased time in shelter facilities that are not designed to provide the services needed by the child or the child's family, delaying permanency and stability for children.**
- **When children in care are enrolled in schools, there is often no communication between the DHS social worker and the school administration. This lack of coordination between DHS and the schools has been detrimental to the academic success of children in out-of-home placement.**
- **Courts in some rural counties continue the antiquated practice of scheduling numerous juvenile court hearings for the same time, requiring parties to wait inordinate periods of time for a short hearing. This creates unreasonable burdens on parents, foster parents, and children who may wish to attend the hearing and also contributes further pressure on an over-burdened child welfare system by needlessly wasting the time of social workers, private providers, and CASA volunteers.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE IOWA LEGISLATURE:

- Eliminate the caps on group care and allocate sufficient resources to the Iowa Department of Human Services to allow: (1) the full array of necessary services to be available to families and children in crisis based upon need rather than availability; and (2) specific funding to be earmarked for preventive services.
- Fund the statewide expansion of the CASA and ICFCRB programs to maximize community ownership and involvement in providing safety and permanency for Iowa's most vulnerable children.
- Enact legislation requiring DHS to provide case specific information about a child in placement to local school authorities immediately upon enrollment in a local school.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE IOWA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES:

- Develop policies and procedures that require a caseworker to share complete information with school authorities concerning a child in DHS custody immediately upon enrollment in school.
- Take whatever steps are necessary to curb the turnover and/or reassignment of field social workers.
- Reinstate preventive services as a priority for children and families.
- Ensure a greater degree of continuity between the different service areas in utilization of best practices for child welfare programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE IOWA SUPREME COURT:

- Expand the number of judges dedicated exclusively to juvenile court cases (Associate Juvenile Court Judges) to implement the goal of "one family-one judge" recommended by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.
- Prohibit the practice of scheduling numerous juvenile court hearings for the same date and time on the court calendar.

